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ABSTRACT

Academic libraries in South Africa are increasingly under pressure to provide Internet-based information services. Due to the historical background (i.e., apartheid policies), however, some postsecondary institutions were better endowed than others in terms of financial resources, library personnel, material resources, and with respect to Internet facilities and services. Similarly, library and information science (LIS) education and training departments have in the past differed significantly in terms of resources and staff available to train library personnel who eventually staff academic libraries. Consequently, institutions are categorized as Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs) and Historically Advantaged Institutions (HAIs). This paper presents survey results of members of the Eastern Seaboard Association of Libraries (esAL) consortium for cooperation among libraries in South Africa that assessed Internet connectivity, ways that the Internet is used, skill or comfort levels with Internet services, problems using the Internet, and training needs. (MES)

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Internet use and training needs of staff of the esAL consortium, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa: partnership between Historically Disadvantaged and Advantaged Institutions (HDI's and HAI's)

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Paper 1

The potential role and use of the Internet in the provision of information services for both research and study in South Africa's tertiary institutions is no longer a highly debatable issue. Although a big part of the academic community may not be fully aware of the full potential and limitations of the Internet in academic work, nevertheless, they are increasingly becoming aware of it through the publicity it continues to receive in the mass media, tertiary institutions themselves government pronouncements [for example, the "crusades" by Deputy President Thabo Mbeki on the country's move towards an information society and the role of information technology, particularly the Internet and Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, Jay Naidoo's Internet connectivity and establishment of Tele-centres], and so on.

Academic libraries in South Africa are and will increasingly come under pressure to provide Internet-based information services. Due to the historical background [the apartheid policies] however, some tertiary institutions were better endowed than others in terms of financial resources, library personnel, material resources and indeed with respect to the Internet facilities and services. Similarly, library and information science (LIS) education and training departments have in the past differed significantly in terms of resources and staff available to train library personnel who eventually staff academic libraries. Consequently, we have had

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institutions categorised as Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDI's) and Historically Advantaged Institutions (HAI's). In a sense there has historically been a gulf between the information rich and information poor, in terms of LIS education and training and library and information services and facilities available at HDI's and HAI's, respectively. In spite of this gulf however, library users irrespective of where they are based [HDI's or HAI's] expect the best service from their libraries.

While traditional library resources and services are best suited for meeting particular kinds of research and study information needs within the academic community, the Internet is best suited for other academic information needs and in other cases, it can supplement traditional library services. The question for academic libraries, even those of South Africa therefore, should not be so much as to when will the Internet replace the library or how best will librarians counter the challenge but rather, as Radcliff, du Mont and Gatten (1993:7) have argued, how best to incorporate the Internet into services offered by the library.

To effectively integrate the Internet into library and information services assumes *that Internet facilities are available within an institution and library*. A further assumption is that, *end users have the knowledge and skills to conduct their own Internet searches* for information related to research and study. Thus, the user must have the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct complex searches and sieve through the vast information to choose the most appropriate she/he needs. In traditional academic library services it has been accepted that researchers, academics and students (end-users) who have the information searching skills, to a large extent, conduct their own searches. However, where they do not possess the information searching skills, librarians either teach or guide them on how to find what they are looking for. In other circumstances, academic librarians or information specialists conduct searches on behalf of the information seekers. Similarly, where the Internet facilities exist in the library this [library] service philosophy must apply, academic librarians (or information specialists) should provide the necessary user education or perform required search(es) for and on behalf of the information seeker. In order for librarians to provide the intermediary or user education services in the use of and access to the Internet resources, further assumes that *they (librarians/information professionals) are knowledgeable about the Internet resources and posses better searching skills necessary in the use of the Internet for research and study needs, than students, researchers and academics*. To be relevant [to the end user] librarians or information specialists must provide the user with something more than what he/she [the user] him/herself can be able to do. In other words, librarians must provide value added information services and Internet services.

Basu (1995) has argued however, that [at the moment] subject librarians experience problems in dealing with the Internet as an information channel and they do not always find what they need when searching the Internet. To illustrate this point he made reference to a study conducted among reference librarians which showed that 29.6% of the study population found information they needed on the Internet between 21% and 30% of the time, while only 14.8% of them found it more than 50% of the time(Basu1995:38). In order for librarians to be of help to the users in the use of the Internet resources for academic research and study, as they have been in providing traditional library services, they need to be better skilled in searching and knowledgeable about the Internet resources. The scenario presented by Basu on the Internet usage among librarians is very similar to that of librarians in South Africa. The levels of awareness and knowledge of the potential and actual use of the Internet has only been on the increase in the last few years. In a survey conducted in 1996 among forty nine (49) academic professional librarians in the university libraries and their branches, of the Universities of Durban Westville, Natal and Zululand of KwaZulu-Natal Province, and reported in a paper (Kaniki, 1996) presented at the first Conference on Information Technology in Tertiary Education- CITTE, it was noted that their [academic librarians'] awareness levels of the Internet usage were very low [general level 9.10%] Table1 below shows librarians' [in 1996] views of the various uses.

Table 1

KwaZulu-Natal Province (1996)
Professional librarians' views of uses/possible uses of the Internet

TYPE OF USE	TOTAL (%)	POSSIBLE TOTALS
Access to/provision of online information	10(20.41%)	49
Current Awareness	8(16.33%)	49
Access to full text (electronic) journals	7(14.28%)	49
User groups/Bulletin boards and dedicated mail lists	5(10.20%)	49
Access to library catalogues	5(10.20%)	49
Email facilities	3(6.12%)	49
Interlibrary loan requests (not necessarily document delivery)	3(3.12%)	49
Running online tutorials/interactive library instruction	2(4.08%)	49
Access to Government Information	2(4.08%)	49
Merely a communication system and not a database	1(2.04%)	49
Uncertain	3(3.12%)	49
Totals	**49(9.10%)**	**539**

In order for librarians and information specialists to attain the necessary knowledge and skills in the use of the Internet resources and facilities there must be *library and information science education and training programmes and institutions to impart the Internet knowledge and skills to LIS staff either as part of pre-qualification or post-qualification education and training*. Provision of the Internet facilities and services, and the training of library staff is obviously expensive, especially in a country like South Africa.

South African academic libraries and LIS education and training departments [both at HDI's and HAI's] face the hush realities of lack of material, financial and human resources. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the country is faced with so many basic needs, that higher education and library services are not as a high priority for government funding as other sectors like health, housing, and basic education. This has led to the realization that no one library or institution is able to provide its users and trainees with all the resources and services they need on its own. Therefore, academic librarians and their libraries have been looking to partnerships and creation of library consortia for cooperation and resources sharing. These consortia have been regionally based. Some of the active consortia include CALICO (Cape Library Consortium) ; GAELIC (Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium) and esAL (eastern seaboard Association of Libraries) in KwaZulu Natal province. In the Western Cape area where CALICO is located for example, tertiary departments or units (both technikons and universities) their libraries and library and information science training institutions have developed a joint *Information Literacy* course, INFOLIT for undergraduate students. This course, with a standard subject content and expected outcomes, is "taught" both via the Internet [web based] and class contact by different institutions including technikons and universities of the Western Cape as needed.

The esAL consortium for cooperation among libraries was established in terms of an agreement signed by librarians and vice chancellors of the esATI (eastern seaboard Association of Tertiary Institutions) which includes the Universities of Durban-Westville, Natal and Zululand, and the technikons of, ML Sultan, Mangosuthu, and Natal. Specifically esAL:

aims at creating a coherent, regional library resource by promoting a range of interactive programmes, with the hope of creating the best library system in the country at the lowest cost

in the country, thanks to co-operation that has guided the libraries in the past. Benefits include dedicated inter-library loan courier service, cross-institutional membership for staff and graduate students, shared staff development programmes, jointly developed modules for student orientation, and cost-savings through shared journals and abstract holdings, all of which advance the aim of wider accessibility and more efficient dissemination of knowledge and information (esATI. esATI Project info update, 1998)

"Cross-institutional membership for staff and graduate students, shared staff development programmes, and jointly developed modules for student orientation," as envisage in esAL agreement all have direct and immediate relevance and impact on the integration and use of the Internet services in the esAL libraries. Cross instructional membership of staff and students will mean that library users will expect a minimum service in any one of the libraries visited, which may necessarily include Internet services, among eaSAL members.

The esAL consortium provides a conducive environment for the shared development or adaptation of some already existing Internet training courses for training prospective library and information professionals and provision the Internet continuing education courses to practising librarians. It is obvious from various required competencies, like those published by the Special Libraries Association (1998) that in the future, library and information science professionals at all levels, will be required to have some competency in information technology [and particularly the Internet usage]. At a recent (May 7, 1999) seminar on *Library and information science in the next millennium*, organised by students of library and information science at the University of Zululand and attended by not only LIS students but also academic librarians and journalism students, it was evident that the current crop of trainee library and information professionals and indeed practising librarians realise that information technology knowledge and skills, particularly those of the Internet are critical to their work and future prospects. They all would want to be equipped with information technology skills and especially those related to the use of the Internet. In a paper presented at the same seminar, it was argued that "...the strength of information professionals and librarians will be to facilitate access to and accommodate a variety of information formats, collections and points of access so that print, microform, digital and audio-visual resources are accessible and distributable (Kaniki, 1999).

The Internet training course(s) can be developed and jointly offered by and among the esAL consortium in conjunction with the three esATI library and information science (LIS) departments. The LIS education and training departments are located at the universities of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) and Zululand, and the ML Sultan technikon. The LIS departments at the universities of Natal and Zululand, which are HAI and HDI respectively, have historically trained professional librarians, while the ML Sultan technikon (an HAI) has historically trained para-professionals or support staff [this trend may soon change with the technikons like ML Sultan have began training at the bachelor and master of technology levels]

The Internet courses can be offered jointly and with shared facilities as needs arise or they can be offered by individual institutions and libraries . The key factor is that the development and/or adaptation of existing Internet courses for different levels of trainees is shared thus having a broader base of resources and experts. The facilities for training library and information professional especially for continuing education purposes can also be shared and rotated between institutions. This will certainly enhance the spirit of the esAL consortium agreement.

To identify appropriate existing Internet courses or in order to develop appropriate ones requires an understanding of the training needs of those to be trained, the availability of Internet facilities within institutions and identification of persons to train library and information professionals. As a contribution to this process, this author embarked [in April 1999] on a survey to assess the Internet facilities, use and training needs within the esAL consortium, KwaZulu-Natal. Some of the preliminary findings are presented in this paper. The full findings of this survey will be published in dues course in 1999 and 2000.

The survey covered all tertiary institution libraries in KwaZulu-Natal and all library staff, both professional and support/paraprofessional staff, excluding those who have little direct contribution to librarya and information provision, like messengers, cleaners, bindery staff and so on. The institutions included were those of the esAL consortium, namely, the technikons of Mangosuthu (HDI), ML Sultan (HDI) Natal (HAI) and the universities Durban-Westville (HDI), Natal - Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Medical campuses (HAI) and Zululand, both main and Umlazi campuses (HDI). A total of three hundred and fifty (350) questionnaires have been distributed, collecting data on a variety of issues including: connectivity; computer facilities availability; usage of the Internet; skills and knowledge of the various resources and services; problems in the use of the Internet and training needs. At the time of preparing this paper (May 1999) eighty (80) questionnaires had been received.

It is evident that with the political changes at the beginning of the 1990's and more significantly after the democratic elections in 1994 and with the subsequent constitutional changes, the demarcation can not be said to be that crystal clear between HDI and HAI libraries, particularly with respect to their staff (and related knowledge and skills) and facilities and services. There has been a shift in employment patterns in both libraries and LIS education and training institutions in that persons who have trained at HAI's have gone on to work in HDI libraries and vice versa. There has also been changes towards open-access to pre- and post-qualification LIS education and training. Students are not restricted by virtue of their colour as to which institutions they can be admitted. In addition, the changes in financial allocations to HDI's and HAI's, and outside aid to especially the HDI's has been and will continue to change especially with respect to the facilities terrain in libraries. For example, the European Union has targeted its funding for the supply of information technology [and Internet connectivity] towards the HDI's. The Kellogg foundation has also made a substantial infusion of funding of the esAL consortium to facilitate networking. However, it is also evident that both HDI's and HAI's need to share their resources if they are to survive.

All the esAL members within KwaZulu-Natal have full Internet connectivity. The major difference however, is that many professional library staff at HDI's and support staff in both HDI and HAI libraries do not share Internet workstations. Out of the eighty responded, sixty (75%) feel that the Internet is useful and they use it in one way or the other in their work The heaviest usage among all the sixty who use the Internet is simply electronic mail. A high percentage, 70% (42 out of sixty) of those who use the Internet an unfamiliar with other capabilities of E-mail system like; filing E-mail messages; subscribing to E-mail mailing lists/listservs; attaching files to E-mail messages and /or opening and retrieving files attached to E-mail messages. The initial indication is that the Internet is very underutilised, mainly because of lack of skills and knowledge of its use among library staff of all categories.

Although, all professional librarians (33 out of the 80 respondents) indicate that they feel the world wide web, Newsgroups and listervs are important resources for the provision of library and information services, twenty (60.61%) of them indicated that they are not well skilled or not too comfortable in the use of these Internet services. In effect all respondents (eighty) feel that they need to learn varied aspects of the Internet, not only for their current job requirement, but in order to continue "to keep up with the trends" in the field. Among professional the thirty three professional librarians, fifteen use the world wide web, in varying degrees and have varying level of skills. However, sixty (out of the eighty respondents) who currently use the Internet in one way or the other, the identified [though in varying degrees] the following as the main problems they face in using the Internet:

- Slowness of the system
- Not enough time to get to grips with regular searching
- Frequency of downtime of the system
- The time it takes to access and search for relevant information (Too time consuming)
- Technical difficulties in accessing the Internet
- Lack of clarity about the pathways to follow to access relevant resources

- Too much "unnecessary" stuff.

Although the data used here does not provide a complete picture of the situation in among esAL members in KwaZulu Natal, it appears that there is a need for Internet training courses to be developed or adapted for the benefit of both practising librarians and pre-professional qualification students. It will be a waste of the limited resources for each institutions and library to develop its own courses as the needs for training appear to be similar across the esAL members. It appears logical therefore that esAL and LIS education and training departments should look to possibilities of developing joint Internet programme(s) and courses. It may not be necessary to develop entirely "new" Internet courses as the identified needs, problems in the use of the Internet and the available expertise, appears to be similar to those experienced elsewhere and can be satisfied by adapting some existing Internet training programmes and courses. As emphasised however, these courses must be linked to the training needs of the library staff with the libraries concerned . Among the key areas of internet training identified by respondents to the survey include the Following:

- Website development and maintenance;
- general skills about the Internet;
- surfing the web and criteria for valuating various search engines and web-sites;
- sophisticated [advanced] web searching
- working with listservs and newsgroups

Among the library staff who currently use the Internet, five from different institutions not only HAI's, indicated that they have sufficient skills to train other library staff Internet usage. The availability of potential Internet trainers from both HAIS's and HDI's is also a positive one in the development of the Internet training partnership between HAI's and HDI's because it will remove the feeling of continued "domination" by HAI's over HDI's. At each of the three library schools there are also individuals who have varying degree of knowledge and skills for Internet training. I believe that a shared programme based on identified needs and developed from existing Internet courses available around the world will enhance the esAL partnership and meet the required library and information competencies being expected of LIS professionals.

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